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## Alexander Campbell as a Publisher

Gary Holloway

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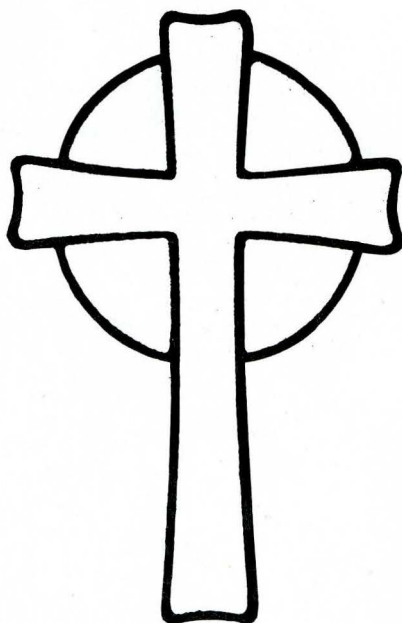
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# ALEXANDER CAMPBELL AS A PUBLISHER

GARY HOLLOWAY

Institute for Christian Studies

In 1819 Alexander Campbell was a young preacher known only in the areas around West Virginia and Western Pennsylvania. Ten years later he was a national figure, the undisputed leader of a religious movement with adherents throughout the nation and in several foreign countries. By his death in 1866 this movement numbered close to 100,000.

The growth of Campbell's influence can be traced directly to his publishing activities. Through his monthly periodicals, occasional pamphlets, a Bible translation, hymnbooks, published debates, and other books, he proclaimed the basic principles, set the boundaries, and answered specific issues for the movement. It was the press, above all, that allowed him to give form and direction to a church, the Disciples or Christians, with no central organization, but organized congregationally.

## The Founding and Growth of the Campbell Press

Alexander Campbell had his first experience in journalism as a young man of 22, when William Sample, the publisher of a weekly paper in Washington, Pennsylvania, urged him to write some essays on the moral order of the local society. Adopting the style of the *Spectator*, Campbell wrote his essays under a pseudonym, in this instance using a girl's name, "Clarinda." During 1810 he wrote several essays under different names, each chiding the community for various moral lapses; but he ended his series to devote himself more to preaching.<sup>1</sup> No doubt this early experience writing for the popular press made Alexander aware of its influence.

For the next few years Alexander began to make his mark as a preacher. He and his father, Thomas Campbell, had organized a nondenominational church at Brush Run, Pennsylvania, in 1811. However, about the time of the birth of his first child, Alexander came to the conclusion that baptism was for adults. Thus he, not his daughter, was baptized, and soon afterward (1813)

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<sup>1</sup> Several of these essays are reprinted verbatim in Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* (Cincinnati: Standard, 1897) 1.283-307.



the Brush Run Church joined the Redstone Baptist Association. Alexander became well known as an able thinker and preacher among the Baptists and so was called upon in 1820 to defend adult baptism in a public debate with John Walker, a Presbyterian minister.

Religious debates were common during this time, but unlike most debates, this one was published in 1820 by James Wilson of Steubenville, Ohio. A second, enlarged edition, containing additional correspondence between Walker and Campbell, was published in Pittsburgh in 1822 by Eichbaum and Johnson. The success of these printed versions opened Campbell's eyes to the power of the printed word. Consequently, he began plans to establish his own religious periodical to be printed on his own press.<sup>2</sup>

In 1823 Campbell had a small print shop (16 feet square) built on his farm near Buffalo Creek. He then bought a press, probably a wooden one,<sup>3</sup> two composing stands, and type and hired a pressman—Robert Buchanan—who had been recommended by William Sample, the newspaper publisher who had given Campbell his first writing assignment.<sup>4</sup> The press was located near the creek so the pages could be moistened before being put on the press, thus assuring a clear impression. Campbell served as publisher, editor, and proofreader. The Campbell Press was to be quite successful, publishing over 46,000 copies of Campbell's works in its first seven years of operation.<sup>5</sup>

In 1830 Campbell enlarged his press to print the *Millennial Harbinger*, having purchased "a large fount of beautiful new type, of a good medium size, and a first-rate new printing press."<sup>6</sup> This was only part of the expansion program for the press. Four years earlier (1826) Campbell had hired a master printer from Wales—William Llewellyn—to run the press. In 1830 Campbell's son-in-law, Albert Ewing, came to assist Llewellyn at the press; the same year Dr. Robert Richardson largely abandoned his practice as a physician to help Campbell edit his periodical. To house this expanded

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas W. Grafton, *Alexander Campbell* (St. Louis: Christian Publishing Company) 106-07.

<sup>3</sup> I found no records of what type of handpress Campbell purchased, but it was probably a wooden press, since early versions of the iron Washington Press, produced by Robert Hoe, had not had time to become popular on the frontier. As we shall see below, Campbell bought a new press in 1830, which most likely was a Washington Press. See Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *The Book in America* (2nd ed.; New York: R. R. Bowker, 1951) 75-76.

<sup>4</sup> This information is found in many works, including Richardson, 2.50. However the name of Campbell's printer is found only in Louis Cochran, *The Fool of God* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1958) 213. Cochran's book is a novelization of Campbell's life. However, he claims "... each person lived and played his role as related here. ..."

<sup>5</sup> Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2.51.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Campbell, "Prospectus," *Millennial Harbinger* 1 (1830) 2.



press Campbell built a two-story building in the town of Bethany, near his farm.<sup>7</sup>

By 1835 the increase in the number of book titles published in addition to the monthly printing of *Millennial Harbinger* led Campbell to reorganize his publishing ventures. That year he placed James T. M'Vay and Albert Ewing in charge of the book department of the press, while he and Robert Richardson continued to edit and print the *Harbinger*.<sup>8</sup> Until 1838 the title pages of Campbell's books read "Printed and Published by M'Vay and Ewing."

In July of 1838 the firm of M'Vay and Ewing was dissolved and the firm of Forrester and Campbell (no relation to Alexander) of Pittsburgh took over the publication of Campbell's books.<sup>9</sup> This arrangement lasted until 1843, when Alexander Campbell was again publishing his own works at Bethany, beginning with the third edition of his hymnal and including several editions of *The Christian System* (originally published by Forrester and Campbell) and *Christian Baptism*. Campbell continued publishing the *Millennial Harbinger* at his Bethany Press until 1864.<sup>10</sup>

## The Products of the Campbell Press

### *Campbell's Periodicals*

The first product of the Campbell press was a monthly periodical, *The Christian Baptist*, the first issue of which is dated July 4, 1823. The date of publication was no coincidence. Campbell wanted his journal to be a plea for freedom in religion, freedom from the control of denominational bodies, just as America had set herself free from tyranny.<sup>11</sup> Campbell himself did most of the writing in *The Christian Baptist*, setting out his program for returning to the "ancient order" of Christianity and satirically ridiculing the current state of Christianity on the frontier. Just as popular newspapers of the period reflected the personalities of their editors and sometimes engaged in personal

<sup>7</sup> Cochran, *Fool of God*, 234, 273, 286, 292.

<sup>8</sup> Cecil K. Thomas, *Alexander Campbell and His New Version* (St. Louis: Bethany, 1958) 60.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas, 60-61.

<sup>10</sup> The 1864 edition of the *Millennial Harbinger* is the last to say "Printed and Published by A. Campbell," although by that date it is unlikely he did much of the press work himself, since he was 76 years old. W. K. Pendleton's name is on the title page of the 1865 and following editions.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Frederick West, *Alexander Campbell and Natural Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948) 3-5.

attacks on their opponents, so Campbell attacked by name all those he felt were corrupting the purity of the primitive church.<sup>12</sup>

Campbell was able to print and distribute so many copies of *The Christian Baptist* and other publications because he could for a time mail them free to subscribers. In 1828 he became postmaster of his little town, Buffaloe, which he renamed Bethany, because another post office in Virginia already had the name Buffalo. As postmaster he had franking privileges and thus mailed over 9,000 magazines, books, and letters, free of charge to his followers throughout the country and abroad. In 1830 this franking privilege was withdrawn from postmasters, perhaps in response to Campbell's actions. He continued, however, as postmaster for almost thirty years.<sup>13</sup>

In 1830 Campbell determined he would end *The Christian Baptist* and begin a new religious periodical. He had begun to have several differences of opinion with the Baptists, and many Baptist associations were expelling Campbell followers. By 1832 Campbell's movement was no longer part of the Baptist Church. Campbell was also afraid that "Christian Baptist" was becoming the name of his followers, a nonscriptural name less appropriate than the biblical "Disciples" he preferred.<sup>14</sup> He wanted his new periodical to have a more positive thrust than *The Christian Baptist*, and he hoped that it would promote the reform of religion that would prepare the world for the second coming of Christ.<sup>15</sup> Thus monthly from 1830 to 1863 Campbell edited and published the *Millennial Harbinger*.

For forty-one years, then, Campbell published a monthly religious periodical, doing most of the writing and much of the proofreading, and being in charge of the printing and distribution. These periodicals—the heart of Campbell's publishing program—extended his influence throughout the nation and the world. Many people, some as far away as England and Australia, became followers of Campbell's reforming movement without ever personally meeting him or any of his followers, but by reading these periodicals.<sup>16</sup>

#### *Campbell's Debates*

Along with his efforts as a publisher Campbell gained fame as a public debater. As mentioned above, his debate with the Presbyterian Walker on

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<sup>12</sup> Grafton, A. *Campbell*, 108-09.

<sup>13</sup> Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2.180-81; Lester G. McAllister, *Just Like I Heard It* (Nashville: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1989) 2-3.

<sup>14</sup> Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2.285.

<sup>15</sup> Richardson, 302-03.

<sup>16</sup> For examples, see Jerry Rushford, "The Stroke of His Pen," *Gospel Advocate* 130 (1988) 19-20.



baptism was published and helped convince him of the power of the press. His next debate was with another Presbyterian preacher W.L. Maccalla, also on the subject of baptism. The debate was held in Washington, Kentucky, in October 1823, and Campbell determined to publish the debate himself as soon as possible. The purchase of printing equipment in 1823 enabled him to publish not only *The Christian Baptist* but also the debate with Walker in 1824. The published debate of over 400 pages was not a verbatim transcript but was recreated from the notes of Campbell and his followers. It is no wonder that Maccalla objected to its publication.<sup>17</sup>

Campbell's next debate made him world famous. In his first two debates he had defended the Baptist view of baptism against the Presbyterian practice of sprinkling infants. In 1829 he was called upon to defend Christianity itself against the views of the famous British "skeptic" Robert Owen, best known for his utopian community of New Harmony, Indiana. The debate, which took place in Cincinnati, received press coverage throughout the country. Campbell arranged for a stenographer to record the debate verbatim, and he paid Owen for his rights to the printed debate. Just a few months after the debate, the printed version came from the Campbell press, two volumes in one, a total of 552 pages. The debate sold well and was reprinted a few years later by a London Press.<sup>18</sup>

Campbell's last two public debates—with the Roman Catholic bishop John B. Purcell in 1837 and with the Presbyterian N.L. Rice in 1844—were not published by the Campbell Press but by other publishers. The wide distribution of all Campbell's debates made his a household name in America by mid-century.

#### *Bible Translation and Hymnals*

Early in 1826 Campbell began to work on a translation of the Bible. He felt the Authorized or King James Bible had been a good translation but that changes in the English language had caused several passages in that version to become obsolete. He did not make this translation completely from scratch, but generally followed the translations of three Scottish scholars—George Campbell, James Macknight, and Philip Doddridge—giving them credit on the title page. This translation, popularly known as *The Living Oracles*, came from the Campbell Press in an octavo edition of 550 pages in 1826.<sup>19</sup> A

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<sup>17</sup> Richardson, *Memoirs*, 95.

<sup>18</sup> Richardson, 268-84.

<sup>19</sup> The title page actually reads, *The Sacred Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists of Jesus Christ Commonly Styled the New Testament. Translated from the Original Greek by Doctors George Campbell, James Macknight, and Philip Doddridge, with Prefaces, Various Emendations and an Appendix by Alexander Campbell*. Buffaloe, Virginia: Alexander Campbell,



second emended edition was published in 1828, with other editions, including a pocket-size edition and a Welsh-language edition, being issued later.

Campbell's was the first truly modern translation of the Bible. Besides updating language, it also translated certain terms that the King James version had really only transliterated. For example, in Campbell's version "baptize" is replaced by "immerse." This was also the first English translation to be based on the work of Johann Griesbach and other textual critics who had improved the text of the Greek New Testament.<sup>20</sup> Campbell's translation did not have a wide appeal beyond his own movement and was particularly opposed by those groups practicing infant sprinkling, since it used "immerse," not "baptize." Baptists also opposed it since it made John not "the Baptist," but "the Immerser."<sup>21</sup>

Taking his view from Paul's injunction in Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16 to "sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs," Campbell felt the practice of singing only Psalms in worship was not enough. He therefore compiled his own hymnbook entitled *Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*, which came from his press in 1828. This first hymnal had only 125 songs, all selected from other hymnals, and contained no musical notes—only a notation of the proper meter for each hymn. Campbell was opposed to notes in hymnals, since he felt the emphasis in singing should be on the teaching contained in the words, not on the beauty of the music.<sup>22</sup>

The Campbell hymnbook grew in size with each subsequent edition. Beginning with the fifth edition in 1838, the book was stereotyped to make printing of subsequent runs easier. In 1864 Campbell gave the copyright of the book to the American Christian Missionary Society. The Society published its first edition in 1865, the same year Campbell published the last edition of the hymnal from his own press. By that time the hymnal contained 1,324 songs.<sup>23</sup>

Campbell's Bible and his hymnbooks gave him some control over the worship of churches that were scattered throughout America. Since these Disciples Churches had no set form of liturgy and no central ecclesiastical control, they needed these liturgical documents to help them develop a sense of identity as a single church.

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1826. With a title this long, it is no wonder it became known as *The Living Oracles*, which was used as the cover title of some editions.

<sup>20</sup> Frank Pack, "Alexander Campbell the Scholar," *RQ* 30 (1988) 149-50.

<sup>21</sup> Richardson, *Memoirs*, 147-48.

<sup>22</sup> Enos Dowling, "The Alexander Campbell Hymnbook (1828-1865)," *RQ* 30 (1988) 149-50.

<sup>23</sup> Dowling, 156-58.



### *Other Publications*

Campbell's other publications consist mainly of short pamphlets, many of them reprints of articles in the *Millennial Harbinger*, on significant religious questions of his day. For example, in 1831 he wrote one of the earliest reactions to Mormonism.

His only other major publications include a large book on baptism and his only attempt at what might be called a systematic theology (although he hated that term), *The Christian System*. First printed by the Campbell Press in 1839, the book had great influence on the Disciples and has been reprinted several times by various presses.

### The Significance of the Campbell Press

It is quite probable that the Restoration Movement spawned by Campbell and the three large churches that came from the movement—the Disciples of Christ, the Christian Churches, and the Churches of Christ—would not exist if Campbell's works had gone unpublished. It was through his editorials in his papers and his published debates that he became known throughout the world as one who called for a return to the primitive church of the NT.

Not only did his publications give birth to the movement, they also allowed him some measure of control over it. Since Campbell believed the NT church had no head but Christ and was led only by local, congregational leaders, he opposed any ecclesiastical organization beyond the local congregation, unless it was strictly voluntary.

However, even though he had no formal authority over the churches, he had great influence through his publications. Someone has said that the Disciples did not have bishops, but they did have editors.<sup>24</sup> Campbell ruled as a bishop-editor; and although he had no formal authority, it was almost impossible to successfully oppose his opinions in the church. Other preachers in the movement started papers; but, when an attempt was made to form a publication society for the entire church, Campbell opposed it as unnecessary. In his view the brotherhood already had a national publication and a nation press—his.<sup>25</sup>

One of Campbell's legacies to his movement is his interest in publishing. After his death the number of papers in the movement multiplied.

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<sup>24</sup> I have not been able to find the original source of this statement, but it is quoted widely in churches of the Restoration Movement and is found in W. E. Garrison and A. T. DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ, a History* (St. Louis: Bethany, 1958) 253.

<sup>25</sup> Garrison and DeGroot, 256; Eva Jean Wrather, *Creative Freedom in Action: Alexander Campbell on the Structure of the Church* (St. Louis: Bethany, 1968) 28-29.

Various editors continued to rule portions of the brotherhood as unofficial bishops. Indeed, every major division in the movement since the time of Campbell has been formalized by the rise of rival periodicals. Until quite recently, the most powerful position one could have in these churches was to be the editor of a prominent publication.

In short, the press made Campbell famous and thus gave his ideas a hearing. Many followed his plans for church reform and joined his movement. He guided and controlled that movement through his publications. Today the followers of Campbell have organized their churches in different ways; yet each branch of the movement he founded still looks for guidance, in part, to the seminal ideas in his publications.